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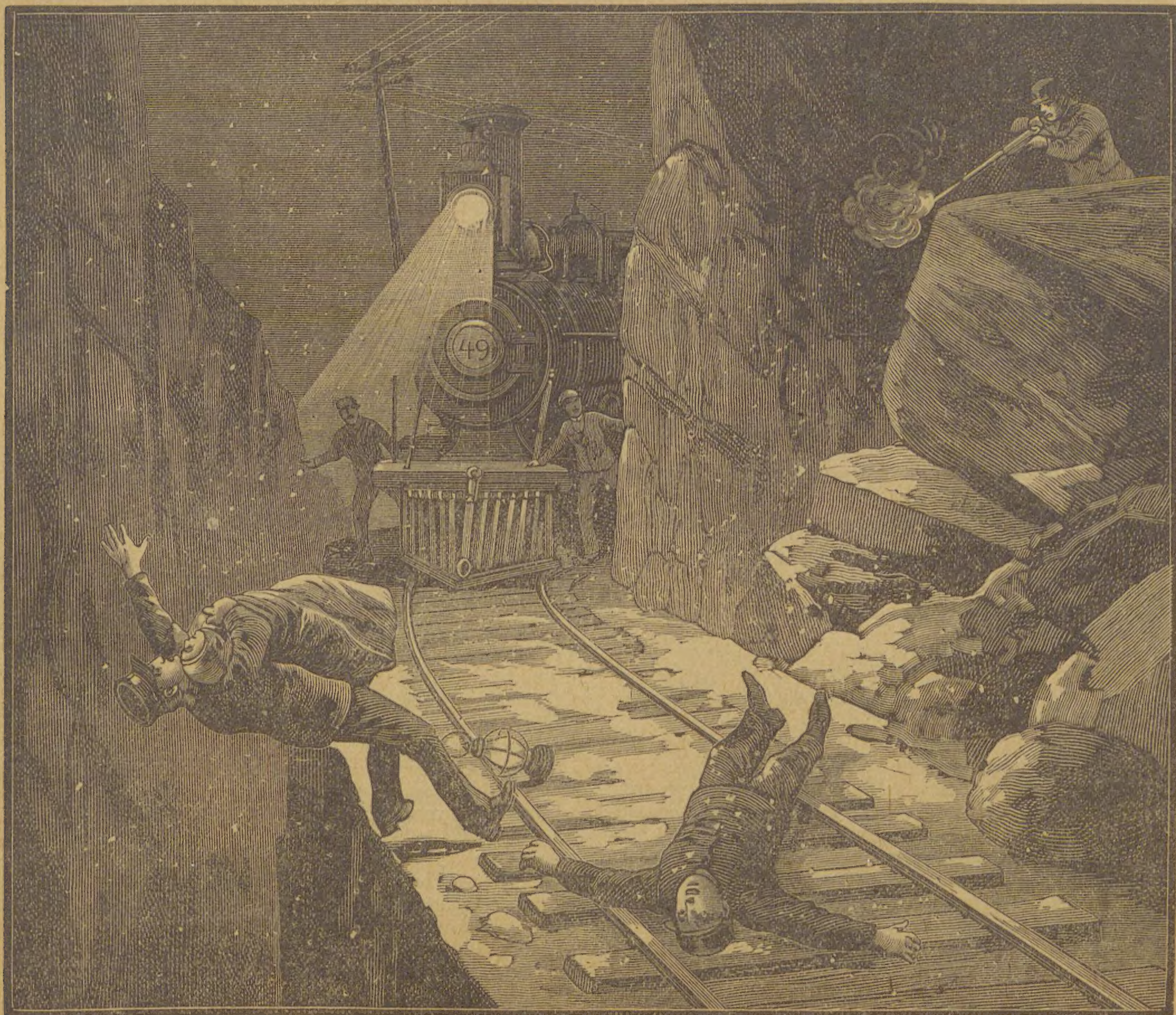
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Smokestack Bob, The Hero of the Rail. BY J. R. SCOTT.



Again the report of the cowardly, unseen assassin's rifle rang out, and with one wild shriek, and with the little girl still clasped in his arms, Smokestack Bob, the gallant engineer, bounded over the side of the canyon that yawned beside the track and disappeared.

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SMOKESTACK BOB,

THE HERO OF THE RAIL.

A STORY OF OUR DARING RAILWAY MEN.

By J. R. SCOTT,

Author of "The Rival Scouts," "Dick Wright and His Band of Cannibals," "Red River Bill," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF A NIGHT ON THE RAIL.

"It looks as though we might have a blizzard to-night," said Dan Hood, fireman of "Old 49," Smokestack Bob's engine.

Dan and Bob had run together on "Old 49," the big eight-wheeler, as fireman and engineer for several years, although they were both young men.

Robert Rawlins, which was Smokestack Bob's real name, had the entire confidence of his employers—the Pacific Railway managers—and there was not a better or more reliable man on an engine anywhere than he.

Of Dan Hood, Smokestack Bob's fireman, the same might be said.

Yet, for all that the company employing these two men had perfect confidence in their honesty and ability to discharge all the duties of their perilous calling, still they were not in what is termed "good standing" with the company, because they were members of "*The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers*"—a protective and beneficial organization of locomotive engineers.

These young railroad men dared to express their views of the "grinding" policy of the great railway monopolies by which the remuneration of honest labor was reduced to the lowest possible figure.

They dared to assert that there were mutual rights belonging to capital and labor which each was bound to respect, and that the skilled mechanic should receive a just compensation for his labor.

More than this, it was whispered that Smokestack Bob was a leading spirit among the men of the Brotherhood of Engineers, who were at the date of the opening of our story upon the eve of a great strike.

The hand of oppression and injustice, it was claimed, rested so heavily upon the railway men that forbearance had ceased to be a virtue, and when in a frank and manly way they sent their committee to the railway magnates and asked that their grievances might be redressed, they were repulsed, and the representative of the railway said:

"If our wages don't suit you, you can work for somebody else. You are not compelled to remain in our employ. We shall not raise your pay, which is too high now. Railroad men are an improvident class, and if we were to double your wages you would not be any better off.

"I will warn you all that the disaffected ones among you are known, and you will be discharged.

"As to a strike, we have no fear of that.

"The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers only seeks to bluff us, and they dare not strike."

After this all was quietude, and the railway magnates thought that the slaves of the rail were intimidated, and really dare not institute a struggle of labor against capital.

It was the month of March, and the railway men were only waiting for warm weather, for the secret order of the engineers had fully determined upon a strike.

But to return to the conversation which we are about to record.

When Dan Hood made the remark recorded as the opening words of our story, he stood at the door of the cab on "Old 49," addressing Smokestack Bob, who was within it.

In ten minutes the passenger train pulled by "Old 49" would pull out of the little station at Fairfax, and as Bob heard Dan's remark about a storm, he glanced at the sky.

Gray and gloomy were the low-hanging snow-clouds, gray and gloomy were the barren flats that stretched away to the distant mountains, and gray and gloomy in the ghostly light of the dying day was the little hamlet where the train stood.

"It does look like a snow-storm Dan, and it's my opinion we'll get it before midnight," answered Smokestack Bob to his fireman.

Then Dan began to rake the fire and fill up the furnaces for the long run that was before them that threatening night.

Finally the bell rang.

The conductor shouted the traditional, "All aboard!"

The last passenger at this jumped on board, and puffing and wheezing, the great engine slowly pulled out of the station like some gigantic creature endowed with life.

Gathering impetus with each revolution of the drive-wheels, the speed of the train increased, and soon the steam horse was dashing over the iron rails at its schedule speed.

Eighty miles away from Fairfax the road ran through a wild and desolate country among the snow-clad mountains, by the side of yawning canyons and through wild defiles.

A steep up-grade began here, and the speed of the train decreased each moment.

The rail was bad, and the stream of sand from the line box that fell upon it barely served to afford sufficient friction for the engine wheels to traverse it.

Dan Hood and a little German brakeman stood at the front of the cow-catcher, on the guards before the headlight.

They were watching ahead, for slowly as the train was going a lookout was always kept on the track ahead here.

Suddenly Dan Hood uttered an exclamation, and clinging to the guard with one hand, while he shaded his eyes from the snow-flakes that were falling about him, as he stood in the light of the glaring head-light, he gazed up the track.

"The red light! A danger signal, as I live, and in this uninhabited country too. This is very strange," cried Dan, and leaping back to the cab he shouted to Smokestack Bob:

"See the red light, old man!"

"Yes," answered the young engineer, and he reversed the lever, sounded the signal to "down" the air-brakes, and the engine stopped.

Smokestack Bob leaped to the ground, and, followed by Dan Hood, he ran up the track to the red light.

Reaching it, the two railroad men saw an ordinary railway red lantern upon a boulder by the side of the track.

But there was nothing wrong with the track.

They could discover no danger, and what was yet more remarkable, no human being could be seen in the neighborhood.

"Well, this beats me!" muttered Dan Hood.

"It is the most remarkable occurrence I ever heard of. I am sure there must be some one hereabouts," said Bob. They searched all around.

"Hello! you come out and show yourself," Bob called out, just as if he knew that there was some one lurking near.

No one answered.

Then Dan called out, and his shout was that peculiar rough manner of expression that is so often heard among the railroad men.

Still no answer.

"Come, Dan, we've no time to look into this mystery further. We're ten minutes behind time now," said the engineer.

He was turning away with the red light in his hand, when Dan Hood cried:

"Hello! Good God, Bob, what's this?"

Instantly Smokestack Bob sprang to the side of Dan Hood, who was kneeling in the snow beside a huge boulder.

As he reached Dan's side, the fireman sprang to his feet with a shapeless bundle, wrapped in a blanket, in his arms.

Quickly it was opened.

"A child!" exclaimed Dan.

"A child!" echoed Bob.

So it was, wrapped in the blanket was a child. A little girl three years old.

The child was insensible.

The cold had chilled it, but life was not yet extinct, for Dan Hood could feel the palpitation of its heart.

"Let's get back to the train. The child may be brought to life yet," said Bob.

They started down the track.

As they did so, there came the sharp crack of a rifle twice in quick succession.

Dan Hood fell with a groan.

Smokestack Bob caught the child from his arms, and dashed for the train, shouting help, for he was unarmed.

But again the report of the cowardly, unseen assassin's rifle rang out, and with one wild shriek, and with the little girl still clasped in his arms, Smokestack Bob, the gallant engineer, bounded over the side of the canyon that yawned beside the track and disappeared.

The shots had alarmed the men on the train.

They came hurrying forward.

They reached the red light, for it had fallen from the engineer's hand upon the track, but no trace of Smokestack Bob or Dan Hood, save their tracks and the ominous crimson stain upon the snow, could be found of them.

The men from the train shouted themselves hoarse, and searched everywhere.

All was vain.

The quest was a fruitless one, and finally, in despair, the train-men abandoned the search, and as one of the brakemen knew a little about an engine, the train passed on, and to all on board it the fate of the gallant engineer,

Smokestack Bob, and Dan Hood, his fireman, was a deep, dark mystery.

"A more remarkable occurrence was never heard of, and I am free to confess that I am at a loss to comprehend it in any way," said the train-conductor.

"The boys, neither of them, carried fire-arms, and so the shots we heard must have been fired by a third party," remarked Sam Sloan, the express-man.

"Yes, and I take it there has been foul play," assented the conductor.

"But why should there have been? Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood are the most popular men on the road, and why any one should wish to injure them I do not know," Sloan continued.

"I give it up, but one thing I do know, the company ought to offer a reward and investigate this matter. But the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers will take it in hand, and if the brave fellows have been murdered, you can bet that sooner or later some one will suffer for it, for the Brotherhood is a far more powerful organization than some folks think, and both Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood stood high in the order," said the conductor.

But it seemed that the fate of the engineer and fireman was destined to be forever unknown.

The railway did not offer a reward for them, although a party of trackmen were sent out to search for them.

The trackmen found nothing, and gave up the search.

What course the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers took in the matter can only be known as the story proceeds, for all the doings of that organization were kept a profound secret.

As has been stated, the Brotherhood were upon the eve of a strike—that is to say, a strike had been decided upon, and they were only waiting for the spring to open to inaugurate it all over the country, and at this time unusual mystery and secrecy surrounded the order.

If they sought to solve the mystery of the fate of Smokestack Bob and his fireman, they did so in secret.

CHAPTER II.

TOMMY, THE FOOL—MONK MARVIN, THE VILLAIN—A DASTARDLY PLOT—A LIFE BETWEEN A MAN AND THE WOMAN HE LOVES—TOMMY'S GRATITUDE.

TEN minutes before the train ran by, "Old 49," the engine handled by Smokestack Bob, came to a halt on the up grade in the mountains. As narrated in the preceding chapter, a man was climbing up the mountain-side from the railway track toward a plateau above.

This person was a small man, and a glance at his face would have satisfied any one that he was an idiot.

His forehead ran straight back from the point of the nose to the back of his head, which was formed somewhat like that of the Australian native, or the Digger Indian.

His big, expressionless eyes and drooping lower jaw, great ears and wide mouth, all rendered him the ideal in appearance of the fool.

"He! he!" chuckled the idiot, as he made his way up the mountain-side.

"He! he! me leave the baby. He! he! Tommy leave the baby. He! he!"

His voice was a curious, squeaking one, and he snapped his fingers as he muttered, and gesticulated in a strange, grotesque manner.

Up, up he climbed, evincing the agility of a squirrel in ascending the steep ascent.

The idiot's arms were disproportionately long and ape-like.

This malformation—if such it could be called—was of material assistance to him in climbing.

It would have been an impossibility for an ordinarily proportioned man to descend the mountain-steep or ascend it at this point, but to the ape-like idiot the task was a comparatively easy one.

He had proceeded two-thirds of the way up the steep when a man upon the plateau toward which he was climbing, and who was watching him with some anxiety, called out:

"Make haste; Tommy, curse your stupidity; I hear the whistle of the approaching train, and if you are discovered all may be lost!" cried the man.

Then to himself he muttered:

"I would have descended to the railroad track and placed the brat upon it myself, but I couldn't climb down the mountain, so I was obliged to intrust the task to the idiot, Tommy. He scarcely remembers the occurrences of one hour until the next, so he is the most valuable assistant I could have in this affair.

"He will never betray this night's work, and by this bold stroke I remove the one life that stands between me and the woman I love.

"Ethel Daverage, the station-agent's daughter, at Fairfax, was married when very little more than fifteen years of age, and her husband died within a year, but he lived to see his wife a mother, and on his death-bed some strange fancy seized him, and he made her promise never to marry again while her child lived.

"Strange it was that I, Monk Marvin, the son of a railway magnate who controls the leading railways, should fall in love with the poor old station-master's daughter, and yet I did.

"Fate threw her in my way, and fate ordained that I should love her madly.

"But when I offered her my heart and hand she refused, telling me of her promise to her dead husband, but she also told me that even if her little girl were dead she could not marry me, for she did not love me.

"Then I fancied that certain rumors that had reached my ears concerning a locomotive engineer by the name of Bob Rawlins, or Smokestack Bob, might be true.

"Report said that he too was in love with the beautiful young widow, whose promise to her dead husband bound her to remain single as long as her child lived.

"I mentioned Smokestack Bob's name to the widowed daughter of the station-agent, and from her manner I felt confident that for once report spoke correctly, and that she loved the young engineer.

"From that moment I determined that I would ruin him, and that Ethel *should* be my wife.

"Ethel's husband died in poverty, and she is dependent upon the bounty of her father, the old station-agent at Fairfax, with whom she now lives.

"Although John Evylin has been a frugal man, a few months since all his savings were swept away by the failure of a bank in which he had them deposited, and he is now dependent entirely upon his small monthly pay.

"Having ended the life that stands between me and Ethel Daverage—for the coming train will crush the child to death—I shall next see that Smokestack Bob is discharged from the company's employ, and then I shall again visit Ethel Daverage.

"I shall place before her the terrible alternative of seeing her old father discharged from the place he has filled so long under circumstances which will render it impossible for him to secure another situation, and which will bring him to actual want, or she shall marry me."

Thus ran the thoughts of the villain on the mountain-side as he awaited the coming of the idiot who had been sent by him to place the child upon the railway track.

But in an instant or two all the thoughts, which it has taken some space to record, flashed through the mind of the scheming wretch.

But now the idiot gained the plateau.

The train was very near now, and in a moment or so it would sweep by.

But yet a curve hid the train from the sight of the men on the plateau.

Although the night was not very light, the locomotive

head-light could of course be seen were it not hidden by intervening rocks.

Suddenly Monk Marvin uttered a terrible oath, and turning upon the idiot, who stood by his side, he caught him by the throat.

"Fool! Fool! Accursed fool! why did I trust this work to you? Curse you, you blundering wretch, *you have left the red-light lantern beside the track.* Know you not that a red light is the railway danger signal? The engineer will see it, and stop the train in time to save the child; for on this steep grade a halt can be made at short notice even by an engine going at a fair rate of speed.

"All is lost! They will save the child!"

Thus almost shrieked Monk Marvin as he shook the idiot until his teeth rattled.

"Don't! Don't!" whined the fool.

"I ought to kill you," gritted the railway magnate's son.

"Tommy good boy! Tommy leave baby! He! he! he!" chuckled the idiot as the infuriated villain flung him away from him.

At that moment the glaring head-light of "Old 49" shot into view, and almost immediately the train came to a stand-still.

"Curse the fate that caused the fool to leave the lantern beside the track. It has been seen by the men on the train, and there come two of them," muttered Monk Marvin.

A moment or so and Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood were upon the track just beneath the plateau.

They took up the red lantern, and Marvin watched them breathlessly until the fireman found the child.

At almost the same moment the light of the lantern fell full upon the face of Smokestack Bob, and Marvin recognized the face of his rival.

"A thousand curses! the man is Ethel's lover. Now, by all that's bad, *he* of all others shall not save *her* child. No, no, come what may, let the consequences to myself be as bad as they *can* be, I'll prevent this, and at the same time rid myself of a rival whom I hate.

"I'll shoot down Smokestack Bob and his companion.

"They are within rifle range, and the light of the lantern in their hands will aid my aim."

As he spoke the wretch caught up his rifle that lay beside him, and with quick aim fired twice.

He saw Dan Hood fall, and he saw the engineer pitch head first over the precipice with the child in his arms.

"Ha! my rifle did not fail me; and the man I hate, my rival in Ethel's love, and the child that was a living barrier between us, have gone to their death, for the fall will kill them, I've no doubt, even if the shot did not."

Thus muttering, the assassin and the idiot concealed themselves and waited until the train moved on.

When the train was out of sight they made a long detour, and finally reached the track at a point half a mile down the road to the west, where the descent was less abrupt.

"I will assure myself that the man I hate and his companion, as well as Ethel Daverage's child, are dead.

"The idiot, Tommy, can climb anywhere, and he will descend the canyon and see if the man and child really perished."

Thus thought Marvin, and followed by Tommy, the idiot, Monk Marvin hurried along the railway track in the direction of the point at which the engineer had disappeared over the canyon's edge, with Ethel Daverage's child in his arms.

Reaching this point, to his surprise he found that the body of the man who had accompanied Smokestack Bob, and who had been the first to fall beneath his bullet, had disappeared.

"What means this?" Marvin cried, and then he thought:

"It may be that the man's body was found and carried away by his friends."

Then approaching the canyon, he drew a dark lantern from his pocket, and securing it upon the person of the idiot, he said:

"Climb down to the bottom of the canyon, Tommy.

"It is very steep, almost a perpendicular descent, but I think you can go down it, for you are a wonderful climber."

"Tommy go, Tommy good boy. He! he! he!" said the fool, and with a repetition of his idiotic laugh he began the descent into the canyon.

Monk Marvin knelt upon the brink of the gulch and watched the descent of the fool.

Tommy reached the bottom of the canyon, and with his lantern groped about.

The snow still fell, and it had obliterated all trace of Smokestack Bob and the child.

The idiot finally gave up the search, and like a cat he regained the railway track.

"Tommy not find man, Tommy not find baby, Tommy good boy," the idiot said.

"Curse the luck," grumbled Monk Marvin. "The fall must have killed them, and probably the snow has covered their bodies so that the fool could not find them. Well, the work is done, and now to carry out the rest of my plot. I'll return to Fairfax, for I must not be seen about Elmville, where Ethel is visiting, and from whence I stole the child."

With this, accompanied by the idiot, the villain set out for Fairfax.

Proceeding for a mile in that direction along the track, Marvin then turned aside into the forest, where two horses had been left.

The prime villain and his idiotic assistant mounted these horses and continued by a country road toward Fairfax.

Tommy the idiot was the son of an old woman who resided in Fairfax, and supported herself and her idiot son by doing washing for the railroad men, a large number of whom boarded in Fairfax.

Tommy's father had been killed in a wreck just a month or so before he was born, for the idiot's father had been a brakeman on a freight train.

Monk Marvin—cunning rascal that he was—had made the acquaintance of the idiot while hanging about the town, ostensibly to hunt and fish in the neighborhood, but *really* to make love to the pretty widow—Ethel Daverage.

Marvin bribed the idiot to accompany him that night to Elmville, but the idiot did not know whose child Marvin took to the railway track.

We have seen, however, that the idiot *did not* place the child on the track, and as he had been positively told to do so, it may be that the suspicions of the idiot had been aroused as to the identity of the child, for he had one characteristic—he never forgot a kindness, and, indeed, he seemed to remember nothing else *except* an injury.

Ethel Daverage had been kind to Tommy the fool.

CHAPTER III.

SMOKESTACK BOB CONFRONTS A TERRIBLE TEMPTATION—
MONK MARVIN'S LETTER—THE GREAT STRIKE OF LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS ORDERED.

MEANWHILE what had really been the fate of Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood?

It was, to say the least, a mysterious disappearance in the cases of each of the railway men.

But while Smokestack Bob leaped in the canyon with Ethel Daverage's child in his arms, Dan Hood fell beside the railway track, and consequently it would seem that he should have been found there by his friends from the train.

Although Dan was not found, he was not far away.

The track along the canyon had been built upon a trestle some four feet high, and in order to obtain a solid road-bed thereafter the space beneath the trestle had been filled in with earth.

The action of the water rushing down from the mountain had torn away a mass of earth under the trestle, leaving a thin, frozen crust, and this had given way beyond the ends of ties where Dan Hood fell, and he had been precipitated

into the space underneath, while the heavy snow-storm at once drifted in and concealed the opening.

But Dan Hood was not dead.

The bullet from the weapon of his would-be assassin had merely grazed the fireman's head and stunned him.

Dan Hood remained in an unconscious state for a long time, and when he came to himself, Monk Marvin and the idiot were on their way to Fairfax.

Dan clambered out of the hole into which he had fallen, and shaking off the snow that covered him, he looked about in a dazed manner for the train.

Of course he saw it not.

He was alone upon the desolate mountain-side, and the snow still fell in thick, heavy flakes.

Dan comprehended that he had been left behind, and as he knew that the nearest human habitation was the town of Elmville, ten miles across the country from the railway line, he saw no help for a tramp through the snow to that point.

As he had been shot down before Smokestack Bob made his desperate leap into the canyon, Dan knew not the fate of the engineer and the child whom they had discovered in the snow.

As the fireman picked his way along the edge of the canyon, his footsteps were suddenly arrested by a human voice proceeding from the canyon below.

It was to him a familiar voice.

Dan heard the well-known tones of the locomotive engineer, Smokestack Bob.

"Hello! hello!" cried the voice of the engineer.

"Is that you, Bob?" called back the fireman.

"Yes, I'm down at the bottom of the canyon."

"Well, Bob, the train has gone on and left us, and the nearest town is Elmville, ten miles away. Walk down the canyon toward Fairfax, and I'll keep along on the track until we reach the eighteen-mile level where the canyon runs out, and then I can join you, and we'll strike across to the town."

"All right, Dan. But make haste, for God's sake, or the child—the little girl we found in the snow—will perish," answered Smokestack Bob.

Then Dan hurried along the track, while the engineer made his way along the bottom of the canyon, whose steep sides precluded his scaling them, encumbered as he was with a living burden.

Monk Marvin was right when he suspected that Smokestack Bob loved the beautiful girl-widow, Ethel Daverage, and that she reciprocated his sentiment.

The handsome young engineer, in ignorance of the strange promise not to marry again while her child lived, which Ethel's deceased husband had extracted from her upon his death-bed, had confessed his love, and offered her his heart and hand.

Ethel confessed in return that she loved the young engineer, and then she said:

"While I love you with all my heart, I can never be your wife while my darling child lives, for I solemnly promised my dead husband, the father of my little girl, that I would never marry again during the life of my child."

The young engineer had accepted this answer as final, although it surprised and grieved him.

"I will wait; and, knowing as I do your love for your child, I shall hope that a long life may be before her. Should the time never come when I can make you my wife, we will always be friends, and no other woman shall ever take the place you occupy in my heart."

This was Smokestack Bob's noble answer.

The young engineer recognized the little girl as soon as, by the light of the lantern, her face had been disclosed to him.

When the unseen assassin fired the second shot, Bob thought that the bullet had struck the child, and the cry that escaped him was caused by this supposition, and he leaped over the canyon to save his own life.

The fall stunned him, and he lay buried in the snow,

with Ethel's child in his arms, when the idiot searched for him at the bottom of the canyon.

When he recovered consciousness—for he had been unconscious, as Hood had—the young engineer discovered that the child in his arms had not been injured by the shot which he had fancied hit it.

The little girl yet lived.

But Smokestack Bob knew that the least neglect now would insure its death, and yet he wrapped it up more closely and pressed it to his breast.

But a terrible temptation for a moment assailed him.

The least want of care now, or a delay in reaching Elmville, and he doubted not that the child would perish, and then Ethel would be free—free to marry him.

Noble, true-hearted Bob put the temptation from him manfully.

"I'll save the child, if it be in human power to do so.

"If Ethel's darling perishes this night, it shall be no fault of mine."

Then his only thought was to reach the village of Elmville with the least possible delay.

Bob knew that Ethel Daverage was visiting a friend in Elmville, and he hoped to place the miraculously rescued one in the arms of its own mother.

The young engineer was aware that Monk Marvin had persecuted Ethel with his attentions, and that she had refused his proffered love.

As he knew that Marvin was an unscrupulous man, who stopped at naught to accomplish his own ends, as he reflected upon the strange occurrence of the night, he could not help associating him with the affair.

Marvin's name appeared as a division superintendent upon the list of the railway officials, but the office was a sinecure, secured to young Marvin by his father, the railway magnate, that his hopeful son might have a share of the profits of the road.

Marvin, junior, was most unpopular with the railway men, for he was always first to advocate the cutting down of their wages, and he treated the men under him as though they were little better than slaves.

"I'll wager that Marvin abducted the child, and intended to compass her death."

Thus thought Bob.

At the end of the canyon he met Dan Hood. Mutual explanations were made.

Then they trudged along the country road, which they had entered near the end of the canyon.

Fortunately they overtook a belated farmer with a sleigh, who was on his way to the neighborhood of Elmville.

They were strangers to the countryman, but he gave them a ride.

About a mile from the town of Elmville they alighted from the sleigh and entered the village on foot.

They proceeded at once to the house of Ethel Daverage's friend, and the little girl was placed in its mother's arms.

The joy of the mother, who was frantic with grief at the loss of the child which had been stolen from her side while she slept, may be imagined.

The child was soon restored to consciousness, and it fell into a peaceful slumber upon its mother's bosom.

"You are a noble man, a true 'Knight of Labor,' Robert, and may God bless you for what you have done this night," said Ethel, pressing the hand of the man whom she loved above all others.

Then, after further conversation, Bob asked:

"Did you receive any mail for me to-day? You know I expected to get a 'lay-off' for a day or two, and contemplated spending a few pleasant days here. As I was looking for important mail, I directed that it be forwarded here.

"I didn't get the lay off. My request for leave of absence was refused, and I fancy I have Monk Marvin to thank for it."

"I have a letter which came for you this evening, for I inquired for you at the post-office, as you requested me to;

but, before I give it to you, read this. I found it on the floor of the room from which my child, Bertha, was stolen, after I missed her," said Ethel.

As she spoke she handed Bob a letter.

"Ah, ha! As I suspected. Monk Marvin was the abductor of your child," the young man cried, for the letter was addressed:

"MONK MARVIN, Esq.,
"Fairfax."

"The rascal must have dropped this tell-tale letter when he entered the room to steal away the child," continued Bob.

"Yes, undoubtedly, such is the fact," assented Ethel Daverage.

"But read its contents," she added.

The young man drew the missive from the envelope, and read as follows:

"FRIEND MONK,—Yours at hand, and the contents noted. I will fix matters as you wish, so that Bob Rawlins will be discharged. As to the old man, Ethel Daverage's father, he has been in the employ of the company so long that I fear I may not be so successful in getting him discharged. You had better put up the job on him you told me of, and, if you work it right, the old man can then be discharged and branded as a thief; he'll be unable to procure work of any kind, unless it were manual labor, which he is physically incapable of performing. Then, as you will attend to putting the child out of the way, you may bring Mrs. D. to your terms.

"In return for what I do, don't forget to remember me to your respected father for promotion.

"By the way, I am informed by the *spy*—you know who I mean—that the great strike, which has so long threatened, and which we regarded as merely a *bluff* on the part of our engineers, is about to take place.

"Yours truly,
"Z. COTTEREL."

"FROTHINGTON, March 17th."

"The scoundrel—the double-dyed villain!" cried Bob, indignantly, as he finished reading the letter.

"He's worse than that's a poison rattlesnake," put in Dan Hood.

Smokestack Bob now received from Ethel's hand his own letter, which he read as follows:

"CHICAGO, March —, ———."

"Central Western Committee of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers,

"To ROBERT RAWLINS, Greeting:

"As Grand Master of Division 80 of the Order of the Brotherhood of L. E., you are hereby notified that the Central Committee of our Order hereby orders a strike of all its members employed as locomotive engineers at this date.

JAMES V. OLDHAM,
"C. S."

"It has come," cried Bob.

"And the boys will quit to a man, although we thought the committee had determined to put it off until spring opened," said Dan Hood.

That night the telegraph sent the order to strike to every branch of the Brotherhood, and it was obeyed.

But Bob and Dan Hood had determined upon a course of procedure to thwart the plot of Monk Marvin, which demanded that they should remain in hiding.

CHAPTER IV.

SMOKESTACK BOB AND DAN HOOD TRACK A PAIR OF RASCALS, AND ARE CAPTURED AND BOUND UPON THE RAILROAD TRACK.

THE next morning the daily papers contained an account of the mysterious disappearance of Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood.

A reporter had been on the train, and upon its arrival at the city in which his paper was published, he had lost no time in turning in the sensational item.

As Bob and his companion had arrived in Elmville late at night, no one save the members of the family with whom Ethel Daverage was visiting were aware of their arrival.

They had no doubt that the man who had fired at them was Monk Marvin, and they presumed that he fancied that their dead bodies lay at the bottom of the canyon.

Smokestack Bob called the household of Ethel's friends together in the morning, and said:

"I would request that you, one and all, keep the secret that Dan and I yet live until such a time as I may inform you that secrecy is no longer necessary.

"There is a plot on foot to ruin Mrs. Daverage's father, and I anticipate that she may also be in danger.

"Dan and I have determined to do all in our power to thwart the villainous plot against Mrs. Daverage's father, and also to protect her from a villain who will work secretly and in the dark to accomplish his evil ends.

"In order to successfully meet the cunning schemer, whose object is to force Mrs. Daverage to become his unwilling wife, we must meet him in his own way.

"We must pit cunning against cunning, and secrecy against secrecy.

"Will you promise to keep our secret?"

Ethel's friends willingly gave the required promise, and having cautioned the widow to be constantly upon her guard against some new treachery on the part of Monk Marvin, they made their way the following night to a neighboring town and attended a meeting of the Brotherhood.

Thus their friends knew that they yet lived, but when Bob informed them of his plans, they one and all assured him of their assistance if he needed it.

There was some strong talk of mobbing Monk Marvin at his boarding-house in Fairfax, or at the office of the company there, but Smokestack Bob said "No."

"However much Monk Marvin may merit punishment at our hands, we must commit no overt act of violence. Were we to do so it would only result in injury to ourselves, for the railway company would use it to make capital of in the newspapers, and to deprive us of the sympathy of the public which we now have," Bob said.

Remembering the allusion made by Cotterel in his letter to Monk Marvin about a spy among the engineers, Bob warned them to be on the lookout for him.

Having so disguised themselves that they felt quite confident that they would escape recognition, Bob and Dan returned to Fairfax to keep an eye on Monk Marvin.

"I cannot imagine what Marvin will do to secure the discharge of Ethel's father, John Evelylin, the old station-master, but he is equal to any deviltry, and it will be well to keep a close watch on him," said Bob.

That night they saw Marvin leave his house and walk away toward the country.

Our two friends followed him.

In the shelter of a grove he met a man who was a stranger to the railroad men, but whose appearance and manner stamped him as a dangerous character.

Marvin and the stranger conversed together in low tones, and our friends were unable to overhear what was said.

The earnest manner and cautious tones of the two men served to assure Bob and his companion that they were plotting something which they regarded as of great importance, and which they wished to keep a profound secret.

Finally they separated.

Marvin returned to the town, and the stranger strolled off through the grove.

As they parted Bob overheard the words of the stranger:

"One o'clock sharp, remember."

"There's some scheme on foot for one o'clock to-night, we may rest assured, and we must find out what it is.

"It is now early in the evening, but we'll watch Marvin until the hour the stranger mentioned, and it is my opinion we shall then learn more of this affair," said Bob.

Dan assented, and they kept Marvin in sight as he returned to the village.

He entered his house, and the two railroad men remained upon the watch without until the hour of one, when the stranger whom Marvin had met in the grove came to the house, and he and Marvin, who seemed to have been waiting for him, took their way to the depot.

They stole to a rear window.

The stranger produced the tools of a house-breaker, and the heavy blind that protected the window was soon removed.

Then they entered the depot.

A suspicion of the truth now dawned upon the mind of Smokestack Bob.

"By Heavens, Dan, I believe the wretches mean to rob the office, and then place the crime on poor old John Evelylin," the engineer said.

"I presume you're right, Bob, for, you know, there is sometimes quite a neat sum of money laying in the little company safe in John Evelylin's office over night."

"Yes, and he alone carries the key."

"Is that true?"

"Yes."

"We must prevent this robbery."

"We will," said Bob, resolutely.

Noiselessly the two railroad men crept through the window.

Silently they groped their way along a narrow passage, at the end of which they saw a faint light.

"Do you see the light?" asked Bob.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Well, they are in the office now."

"That's so."

"Come, we'll surprise them."

They both had revolvers.

They meant to use them, if necessary.

But suddenly Dan Hood uttered a groan and sank to the floor.

The next moment there was a dull thud, and Bob fell beneath a cruel blow from a slung-shot in the hand of Monk Marvin.

The stranger had struck down Dan Hood in the same way.

Despite the caution and silence of our friends in entering the building, the two villains had detected their presence, and after lighting a lamp in the office they had crouched in the dark passage until the railway men came, and then—we have seen what occurred.

"What shall we do with them?" asked the stranger.

"Let me see first if I know them," said Marvin.

Bob and Dan Hood were both insensible.

Marvin brought the light.

Their faces were well disguised.

They wore false beards and wigs.

Marvin did not know them.

"They are strangers to me," he said.

"Well, if they tell what has happened you may be sure that your scheme fails, for they will know that old John Evelylin had no hand in this biz," said the stranger.

"That's so," assented Marvin.

"My idea would be to drag 'em out and throw them off the bridge on the railroad a little distance below. They won't be likely ever to tell then."

"No, not in *this* world."

"That's all we care for."

"True."

"Well, what do you say?"

"I agree with you that it will be best to make sure of their silence."

"Of course."

"Come on then."

"Let's take this feller first."

As the stranger spoke, he seized Bob by the limbs.

"Hold on, I've got a new idea," said Marvin, and he secured a coil of rope that hung from a peg in the passage.

"What's your idea?"

"We'll tie 'em on the track."

"Good."

"They will be run over by the mail-train—the only train that runs on the road now that the infernal engineers have struck."

"How soon will that train pass?"

"In an hour."

"All right."

"You see, when the mangled bodies of the two men are found, the impression will be that they were drunk and were walking on the track, for I'll put a half-empty whisky-flask in one of their pockets," said Marvin.

Then they raised the form of the young engineer.

As they carried him from the building, Marvin said:

"We'll return for the other as soon as we get this one disposed of."

They carried Bob down to where a high bridge spanned a swift deep river.

There they secured him across one of the steel rails, first taking the precaution to slip a gag in his mouth.

Still Bob remained unconscious.

"I say, I begin to think that crack you gave him settled him for good," said the stranger.

"No, no," replied Marvin, placing his hand upon his victim's breast.

"I can feel his heart beat yet," he added, after a moment.

"Well, then, let's be moving," the stranger said.

They returned to the depot.

Dan Hood lay as they had left him.

The villains dragged him to the spot where they had bound Bob upon the track.

When they arrived upon the bridge they found that Bob had revived, and he was struggling desperately to free himself.

"Squirm away; you can't get loose, and in half an hour the train will come down on you," gritted Marvin.

"It's the last time you'll interfere in a business that don't concern you," said the stranger.

The moon had come out, and the night was quite light, so that Bob saw the face of the stranger more distinctly than he had before.

"I'll remember that rascal's face, though the prospect now is that it will do me no good, for it seems that Dan and I are doomed to a terrible death," thought Bob.

Having completed binding Dan Hood upon the track in the same manner that they had secured Bob, the two villains retraced their steps to the depot.

With the safe-key, which Marvin had stolen from the pocket of the old station-master while conversing with him after he left the office for the day, the safe was opened, and its contents—over four hundred dollars—were removed.

Then, having locked the safe, the two rascals left the depot, securing the window so as to leave no trace of their work.

"Now we will repair to the house of John Evelylin. He is all alone to-night, as his daughter is visiting friends in the village of Elmville, and we are not likely to be detected. We will place the money in his room, where it will be easily found when the search of his premises—which I shall institute in the morning when the robbery is discovered—is made," said Marvin; and accompanied by his accomplice, he set out for the little cottage of the old station-master.

Meanwhile Dan Hood had recovered his senses, and he and Bob were struggling vainly to liberate themselves.

The situation was a dreadful one, and there seemed no chance for their escape.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAMPS AS TRAIN-WRECKERS—BOB SAVES THE MAIL—
THE TRAIL OF MARVIN—THE HOUSE OF THE STATION-AGENT
—DISCOVERED.

FOR several days a band of tramps had been lurking about Fairfax, although Bob and Dan were ignorant of the fact.

Monk Marvin had caused an article to appear in the newspapers which purported to be an interview between a reporter and one of the striking engineers.

In this article, which had originated entirely in the evil mind of the arch villain, Marvin, the engineer was made to make the most terrible threats against the company who had employed him, and, among other things, he was reported to have said:

"We shall institute a reign of terror and force the company to come to our terms.

"We shall wreck the mail-train, burn bridges, and destroy the property of the railroad to such an extent that the damage done cannot easily be repaired."

This article Marvin intended to cause the public to sympathize with the railway, but it accomplished another end as well.

The leader of the band of tramps who were lurking in the neighborhood of Fairfax saw it, and he conceived the idea of wrecking a train and plundering it.

"Ye see, boys," said this gentleman of leisure, "the blame will be put on the strikers, and we will get the boodle."

The idea met with favor among the tramps, and it was decided that the night the incidents of which were in part related in the preceding chapter, the very train beneath the wheels of which Marvin hoped the men he had placed upon the track would be crushed, should be wrecked at the very bridge where they were bound.

Marvin and his accomplice had been gone but a few moments, and having exhausted themselves in the vain effort to liberate themselves, Bob and Dan were giving way to a terrible feeling of despair, when a half dozen rough-looking men, armed with crowbars, picks, axes, and other implements, came out of the bushes near by and approached the bridge.

These men were the band of tramps who intended to wreck the mail-train which would soon come rushing down the track, for it did not stop at Fairfax, being a through train.

The leader of the would-be train-wreckers was the first to see the men who were bound upon the track.

"Hello! 'Ere's a funny go, boys. 'Ere's two fellers tied to the track. I say, how'd ye come here, mates?" said the tramp, judging no doubt, from the dilapidated costumes in which our two friends had disguised themselves, that they were members of their own fraternity.

But neither Bob nor Dan made answer.

The gags in their mouths rendered them speechless.

The tramp saw the cause of their silence.

"Gags, eh!" cried their leader. "Well, we'll soon have 'em out of yer mouths."

He at once removed the gags from the mouths of the two railway men.

"Now tell us who ye are and how ye came in this fix?" the tramp said.

"We're tramps," said Bob as soon as he could speak.

"And a gang o' the cusses of the town downed us fer liftin' a chicken or two, and bein' bilin' drunk, they thought that it would be a great circus to fix us fer a sure death on the rail."

The tramp gave vent to an oath.

Then he released our friends.

"Here," said Bob, well judging the character of the tramps, "take a nip," and he handed the ring-leader of the party a bottle of whisky which Marvin had placed in his pocket.

The tramp and his companions drained the flask to the last drop in a moment.

"You two fellers seem to be the right sort, an' I'll let ye in to our biz. Ye see we're a-goin' to tear up the track, and wreck the mail-train what are due here in half an hour. In the fuss we'll git in our work. Go through the passengers, gobble up light baggage and skin out. Now you kin have a whack in with us fellers what's put up the job if yer want to. Yer see the locomotive engineers are on a strike, and this job will be credited to them, fer we are agoin' to holler as we leave after goin' through the train that we're locomotive engineers, and that we'll serve every train the company tries to run just as we have this one. There won't be no suspicions on us. What do ye say, fellers—will ye take a hand with us or jump off the bridge with a bullet through yer hearts?"

As he thus spoke the leader the tramps drew a revolver and flourished it threateningly, while weapons appeared in the hands of his men, and half a dozen gleaming pistol barrels covered the two railroad men.

Bob had determined to play a part, and Dan took his cue from the engineer.

"In course we'll go in with yer, pals. What do ye take us fer. Yer kin bet dust we is allers around when there's anything in the way of plunder a layin' loose. We is thoroughbreds from the word go," said Bob.

"Right ye are, pard. Them's my sentiments too," put in Dan.

"Good enough. Come, fellers, we'll cross over and tear up the track on the other side of the bridge," said the tramp leader, advancing.

His party, with Bob and Dan among them, followed.

But Bob meant to save the train which the tramps meant to wreck.

The true-hearted engineer knew that if the tramps succeeded many innocent lives would be lost in the wreck; and when he thought how the wretches had planned to place the stigma of the outrage upon the order of the Brotherhood of Engineers, to which he belonged, his blood boiled, for he knew that the skilled mechanics of the order were, as a class, honorable men, who would never seek to redress the wrongs that had caused them to strike by resorting to dishonorable means.

Previous to adopting the trade of a locomotive engineer, Smokestack Bob had been an expert telegraph operator, but the confinement incident to that occupation had caused him to abandon it for the more congenial occupation of a life on the rail, as a locomotive engineer.

Bob had not forgotten his old trade, and as he reflected upon the situation in which he now found himself placed, he thought that the only way in which the terrible calamity which the tramps had planned could be prevented, was by telegraphing to the next station, ten miles distant, which the mail-train must pass before reaching the station of Fairfax, and the fatal bridge.

But Bob was aware that the telegraph office in the Fairfax depot was closed for the night, and that no message could be sent from there, even if he could get away from the tramps and reach the depot.

What then was to be done?

How could he possibly avert the impending calamity?

As, with feelings of dismay, Bob found himself in this terrible dilemma, he chanced to glance upwards, and then to his joy he saw that the telegraph wire which ran across the bridge was attached to the top of the railing at its side.

Instantly an idea occurred to Smokestack Bob.

"If I can for a few moments escape the notice of the tramps I'll climb up to the top of the bridge and telegraph the message that shall warn the train of danger."

But how was he to do this without any telegraph instrument?

None but an expert could have told.

Soon the tramps were at work tearing up the track. Bob watched his chance, and gliding away back over the bridge, he clambered up to the top of the railing.

The young engineer's heart beat fast, but as yet he had not been detected.

The tramps, intent upon their nefarious work, had not noticed his absence.

"A moment more and it will be too late for them to prevent my sending the message," thought Bob.

He took a heavy knife from his pocket, and reaching the wire he severed it and constituted the two ends into a key.

Then he telegraphed the following message:

"The track at the southern extremity of the Fairfax bridge has been torn up by tramps. Stop the through mail."

"ONE OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS."

"They may answer if the dispatch is received, and I should like to know if they get it," thought the young engineer.

How was he to receive an answer even if one was sent?

The answer again would have puzzled any one but an expert.

Bob knew of a way that had been successful during the war of the Southern Rebellion.

He placed the ends of the wires on his tongue, and by the length of the shocks deciphered the letters, for within five minutes the answer came.

"Your message caught the mail just as it was moving out of the yard.
P. PETERS, Operator."

Bob clambered down from the top of the bridge railing after twisting the ends of the telegraph wire together.

As he reached the track, Dan, who had just slipped away from the tramps, came up.

Scarcely had he joined Bob when a shout from the tramps announced that they were missed.

The engineer hurried away and was soon in the streets of Fairfax, while the disappointed tramps awaited in vain for the coming of the mail.

Four hours later, a repair train, loaded with men, arrived.

The tramps fled into the woods and escaped, while the damage they had done was hastily repaired.

The papers contained an account of the affair next day, and the conduct of the striker who had saved the train was lauded in terms of the highest praise, for it chanced that the editor was an independent man, and the railroad had not bought up that paper, strange to say.

Reaching the streets of Fairfax, Bob and his companion halted.

The shock of the telegraph which Bob had received in his mouth had utterly destroyed his sense of taste, which he did not fully recover for a month.

The young engineer attempted to speak, and he found great difficulty in doing so.

At last he said, in a hoarse, half-inarticulate voice:

"We must make haste to the house of John Evylin; something tells me the rascal Marvin has gone there."

"I suspect he means to connect the old station-master with the robbery of the safe," said Dan.

"Undoubtedly such is his purpose."

They traversed the street leading to the old man's house.

Reaching it, they saw a faint light flickering through a rent in the curtain.

Meanwhile, having reached the house of John Evylin, Marvin and his companion came to a halt, and the former produced a bunch of skeleton keys which he had procured for the purpose of opening the door of the old station-agent's house.

It was not long before the villain found a key that fitted the lock.

The door opened, and he and his companion entered.

They stole across the neat little sitting-room, which they had entered, and opened the door of the old man's sleeping apartment.

As they did so, they were confronted by the old man.

"Monk Marvin!" exclaimed John Evylin, recognizing the division superintendent.

"You have sealed your doom by recognizing me," hissed Marvin.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TABLES TURNED—MARVIN'S CONFESSION—THE RASCAL IN SMOKESTACK BOB'S POWER—MONEY CANNOT BUY THE CONFESSION.

AS Marvin uttered the threatening words last recorded he sprang forward.

John Evylin staggered backward and the lamp in his hand fell to the floor.

It was an ordinary oil lamp, and the fall shivered the thin glass.

The oil took fire.

A conflagration seemed imminent.

Monk Marvin seized the old station-master by the throat, stifling his cries for help.

Meanwhile the stranger tore the bedding from the couch, and with them smothered the incipient fire.

"Well, Monk, what next?" he demanded when the fire was extinguished.

"It will never do to permit this man to betray us, and so I cannot follow out my original plan. If the old fool had not awakened he would not have been injured. As he has recognized, me he must be prevented telling of this affair. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Well, stuff something into his mouth while I secure his hands."

In a moment the old man was secured, and then the two wretches stepped back into the sitting-room.

"I say, Monk, you're goin' further in this biz than I thought for. I don't want to have any hand in the old man's mur——"

"Hush," interrupted the other. "You didn't object to placing those two men on the track, did you? What's the difference whether we do for a man outright or place him where we know death will overtake him?"

"This here old man is so helpless and so harmless I don't want to harm him."

"Bah!"

"Sneer if you want to, but I won't touch him. If you are bound to do the job you'll have to do it alone, that's all."

"Very well, I won't flinch. When Monk Marvin undertakes a thing he carries it through every time, let the consequences be what they may."

"You're a devil, Monk."

"I'm no saint, I'll allow. But now to fix the matter so that the old man can't blow on us, and at the same time make it appear that he robbed the office at the depot," said Monk Marvin.

"I don't see how you are a-going to do that?"

"You don't?"

"No."

"Well, this is my plan. I'll blow the old man's brains out and place the pistol in his hand, while on the table will be placed a note which I shall compel him to write, stating that he robbed the office and shot himself, because he knows I saw him leaving the depot. What do you think of that?" said Monk Marvin.

"You are a cunning fellow."

"Well, now to fix this matter; I'll place the money we took from the depot in the old man's trunk, and then attend to the letter."

As he spoke Marvin produced the money, and placed it in John Evylin's trunk.

Then he produced pencil and paper, and having liberated John Evylin's arms he placed the pencil in his hand, and aiming a pistol at his head he said:

"Write as I dictate, or I'll blow your brains out."

The old man had overheard the conversation that had

just passed between Marvin and his companion, and he knew that he was to be murdered in the end.

He refused to write.

He was gagged so that he could not speak, but he would not receive the pencil.

"Curse you, I'll blow your brains out anyway, and keep the money. Dead, you will be powerless to aid Ethel, and that is all I want," hissed Marvin.

"Hold on!" cried the stranger.

"What is it?"

"Can't you forge his hand? Imitate his writing?"

"I might if I had time to practice, which I haven't."

"Promise him his life and he'll write."

"I do. Do you hear, John Evylin. Write as I direct and your life shall be spared, I swear it," said Marvin.

John Evylin still hesitated. It was evident that he distrusted the rascal's promise.

John Evylin was an honest man from principle, and honor was dear to him.

To write anything which would accuse *himself* of a crime this man would consider the most cowardly of acts.

The old station-master did not know what a moment might bring forth, and it was perhaps more for the purpose of delay than anything else that he hesitated.

Finally he grasped the pencil.

Monk Marvin began to dictate what he desired the doomed man to write.

"*I, John Evylin, having robbed the depot,*" Marvin began.

John Evylin dropped the pencil.

He would die a hundred deaths before he confessed to a crime of which he was innocent.

The torture of the Inquisition could not have forced him to accuse *himself* of robbery.

Monk Marvin had misjudged the old man's character.

"Then you will not write!" gritted Marvin, with clinched teeth, while his hand trifled nervously with the revolver which he held.

The old man shook his head negatively.

An instant before this a face had peered in at the door, which had not been locked by Marvin when he and his companion entered the station-master's house.

As John Evylin said "no!" by shaking his head, Monk Marvin exclaimed:

"Fool! I'll waste no more time with you!"

He was about to raise his weapon to fire at the old station-master, when there was a dull "thud" and a heavy fall in the sitting-room, where the stranger, his accomplice, stood.

Monk Marvin wheeled around, and as he did so he saw his companion stretched upon the floor, while the two men whom he supposed to be safely out of the way, lying bound upon the railway track, stood before him.

The two railway men had reached the house of the old station-master just in time.

A moment more and they would have been too late.

Providence must have ordained that the honest old man, whom Monk Marvin wished to brand with infamy, should escape.

As Marvin caught sight of Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood, neither of whom he had recognized, he uttered a cry of fear, and, quick as a flash, he leveled his weapon at the young engineer.

At the same moment, with a bound, Dan Hood reached the side of the dishonest railway magnate's son, and struck up his aim.

The weapon was discharged, and the bullet flew over Bob's head.

The young engineer caught Marvin by the throat, and he was quickly disarmed.

"Now, then, Monk Marvin!" began Bob.

"You know me!" exclaimed the discomfited villain, with an oath.

"Yes; and you shall write the confession you would have wrung from yonder innocent man. Keep an eye on

the fellow I knocked down, Dan, and, if he attempts to rise, crack him on the head with the butt of your pistol," said Bob.

"All right."

Bob released Marvin, but kept him covered by his pistol, while he took the gag from the mouth of the old station-master, and removed the bonds that secured the old man.

This done the young engineer asked for pen and ink.

John Evylin produced it.

Bob marched Marvin to a writing-desk in the sitting-room, and ordered him to become seated.

The villainous railway official obeyed.

"Now write as I dictate," ordered Bob.

Monk Marvin ground his teeth in impotent rage.

The tables were completely turned.

He was now in the position in which he had placed the old station-master.

He had not the old man's courage.

Besides, the confession which Bob was about to force him to make was the truth.

"I, Monk Marvin, being discovered in the act of robbing the office of the railway company at the station of Fairfax, make the following confession, to which I swear, hoping thereby to secure my liberty at the hands of two members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, who captured me and my companion, Zeb Cotterel, with the proceeds of the robbery in our possession."

Thus spoke Bob, and Monk Marvin wrote down the statement word for word.

When Bob announced the name of Marvin's companion, the villainous railway official started.

"Who in the fiend's name are you?" he demanded.

"It matters not. I am the friend of the workingman, and, as the confession I have repeated indicates, myself and companion are members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers," said Bob.

Then he went on to dictate the remainder of Monk Marvin's confession, as follows:

"I planned the robbery myself, and stole the safe-key from the pocket of John Evylin, who is innocent of any knowledge of the robbery prior to its consummation.

"My object in this was to place the stolen money in John Evylin's house, and make it appear that he was the thief, that he might receive his discharge from the company and be disgraced.

"All this I wished to bring about for an evil purpose of my own.

"(Signed) MONK MARVIN."

"Now let Cotterel up," said Bob, when Marvin had completed the writing of this confession.

"Get up," ordered Dan.

Cotterel, for he the stranger was, arose to his feet.

"Now sign this," ordered Bob.

As he spoke he placed a pen in the man's hand.

Reluctantly, he inscribed his name.

Then John Evylin, Dan Hood, and Smokestack Bob signed the paper as witnesses.

This done, Bob folded it up and placed it in his pocket-book.

"You can go now. You two wretches have signally failed in your work of villainy, and remember, if you ever attempt to molest John Evylin again, or in any way secure his discharge from the situation he has so long filled, I will produce this paper, and on the strength of it lodge you both in jail," said Smokestack Bob.

Like a pair of whipped curs, Monk Marvin and his companion slunk to the door. Cotterel sprung away out of sight, but Monk Marvin, with a pale face, turned in the door, and said:

"What will you take for the paper I have just signed?"

"It is not for sale," replied Bob.

"I will give you a thousand dollars for it."

"No."

"Say five thousand."

"No."

"Then name some figure. My God! that letter gives you the power to ruin me. I must have it at any cost."

"You cannot buy the paper. I shall keep it in my possession until the time comes when I can use it to benefit hundreds of honest men whom the purse-proud money kings of the railway would reduce to abject slavery, by reducing them to starvation, and forcing them to resume work on any terms."

"Hal I understand you. You mean to use that paper in the interest of the strikers?"

"I do."

"Well, come to me first with it. I will see that your demand, if it be in reason, is granted, if you will surrender the paper when your object is accomplished and keep the secret of this night's work."

"I am very influential with my father, who virtually controls this railway, and when he comprehends the situation in which I am placed, he will consent to anything to save the disgrace which the publication of my confession would bring upon his name," said Marvin.

A moment later he was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

MONK MARVIN BARGAINS WITH THE TRAMP—OFF FOR ELMVILLE—SMOKESTACK BOB ON THE TRAIL—THE TRAMP IN THE REAR—MARVIN SURPRISED.

WHEN Marvin and Zeb Cotterel were gone, Bob said:

"I shall now place the money which Marvin stole from the office of the railway company in an envelope, and send it to the president with the statement that two members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers detected the thief."

Next day this was done, while at the same time John Evylin reported that the keys of the safe had been stolen and the safe robbed.

"I didn't know that the man with Marvin was Zeb Cotterel, but it struck me that possibly it was that individual, and I named him merely to test the matter. You see it proved that I was right," said Bob to Dan Hood, as they were conversing next day at the house of a farmer, who was a friend of theirs, and would not betray them.

They still wished to make the prime villain think that they had perished at his hands, for knowing the vindictive character of the man, they knew that he would not hesitate to employ hired assassins to murder them if he knew the truth.

The two railroad men changed their appearance as much as possible the next day, and though they were ignorant of the fact, it was well for them that they did so.

Monk Marvin did not mean to leave any means of gaining possession of the involuntary confession which he had been forced to make, untried.

The rascal met by chance the leader of the band of tramps to whom Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood owed their liberation from the rails upon which they had been bound.

Monk Marvin was a pretty good judge of human nature, and he thought at once that the tramp was the man for his purpose.

As no trains had left Fairfax as yet since the robbery, Marvin felt confident that the two men who had thwarted his scheme of villainy were probably still somewhere in the neighborhood.

Calling the tramp into a saloon, the railway official treated him, and then sounded him in a general way.

The result was satisfactory.

"Do you want to make fifty dollars?" said Marvin.

"Do I want to eat a good dinner? Don't fish want water? In course I wants to make fifty dollars. Say, pard, how many days would that keep me in beer, reckoning forty glasses a day?" replied the tramp, reflectively.

"You can earn fifty dollars very easily, if you can find a

man I'll describe to you, or, in fact, two men," answered Marvin.

"Go ahead, pard. Open out, and let's see ther map."

Thereupon the railway official gave a very correct description of the two railroad men who had baffled him.

"By beavings, pard, I hev seed them fellers," said the tramp.

"When?"

"Last night."

"Where?"

Thereupon the tramp related the incident of finding and liberating the men who were tied on the track.

In conclusion he said, in an injured tone:

"Them two cusses went back on me dead arter me savin' their lives. They put up a job on me somehow—by ther telegraph, I reckon—an' stopped the mail. I'd like to get even with them, I would."

"Those are the very men I want you to find. One of them has a paper in his possession which I want, and you shall receive fifty dollars if you get it for me."

"I'll go for that fifty. If I get my eyes on them fellers once, I'll earn the money. I've got a gang o' fellers a-laying off in the woods near here, and they're just in ter git even with the ongrateful cusses what spoilt our fun last night," said the tramp.

"Very well, I'll meet you here again to-night and hear your report," replied Marvin.

"What's your name?" he added.

"Keevers."

"Well, Keevers, be here at ten o'clock."

"Yes, sir."

Then they separated.

Keevers loafed about the town, and Bob and Dan passed him upon the street, yet he did not know them.

Bob, however, recognized the tramp.

The two railroad men went to the post-office, and the tramp, without any design in the matter, slouched in after them.

He heard their voices.

Then he started, and looked at them closely:

"Well, I'll be dashed," he muttered.

He had recognized the two railroad men.

"Well, 'ere's luck. 'Ere's what I call good old-fashioned 'fore-the-war luck," mumbled the tramp.

He crossed the street to the door of a low grocery and drinking-place, at which a couple of tattered vagabonds stood conversing.

They were tramps.

They belonged to Keevers' gang.

"'Ello, boys; look a-herel!" said Keevers, and beckoning the vagrants aside, he explained who the two men who just then came out of the post-office were, and what he wished to do in order to earn the fifty dollars.

"You two foller me, an' I'll keep on the track of these two fellers we want to down," said the ringleader of the tramps.

Bob and Dan crossed the street, when, without noticing them, Monk Marvin drove by in a single buggy. As the railway official pulled up to the hotel next door to the post-office, some one cried:

"Hello, Mr. Marvin; bound for Hamilton?"

"No; I'm going to Elmville," answered Marvin; and a moment later he drove on.

"Elmville!" exclaimed Bob. "I'll wager the rascal is going there for no good. It may be that he has some evil design on Ethel Daverage."

"Let's follow him," said Dan Hood.

"We will do so, but it will be necessary to procure a conveyance," said Bob.

"There's a livery-stable at the end of the next block."

"We'll hire a team there."

They hurried on to the livery-stable.

Just as they reached it a horse that looked like a good roadster was driven out to a light side-bar buggy, by one

of the stablemen, and a boy came across the street, and said:

"You needn't hitch up the hoss; pa, ain't goin'?"

"What did he order the horse for then? Does he think we ain't got nothing better to do than to harness up and unharness horses for fun?" grumbled the stableman.

As he spoke he started to lead the horse back into the stable, when Bob said:

"Hold on, I'll take the horse; I want to drive to Elmville."

"All right, but it will cost ye a fiver."

"Very well."

Thus in a moment the bargain was concluded.

The horse which Bob had secured proved to be a good stepper, and in a very few moments he and Dan Hood were in sight of Marvin.

They were somewhat surprised to see that there was another man in the buggy with him now.

This party's face was covered with a full reddish beard.

"He must have picked the man up along the road," said Bob.

At this moment, hearing the sound of wheels, Dan turned around.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, looking back. "Here comes our friend, the leader of the tramps, and one of his men."

Such was the case.

The tramp happened to have money enough to pay in advance for a rig, and so he had secured one in order to follow Bob, for he meant to earn the fifty dollars that Marvin had promised to pay him for the papers.

The horse which the tramp had hired was a ring-boned and spavined animal, affected with the springhalt and a little hipped.

That was all that ailed the animal. The consequence was, he was not as speedy as the animals driven by Monk Marvin and Smokestack Bob.

Soon the tramp and his afflicted equine were left behind.

But Bob continued to keep the railway official in sight.

The rascally son of the railway magnate put up his horse at a wayside inn near the edge of the county village of Elmville, and Bob, not wishing to run the risk of recognition, drove on to a hotel in the center of the town.

Leaving the horse there, he and Dan repaired to the home of the friend whom Ethel Daverage was visiting.

Bob told Ethel that he feared that Marvin's presence meant her no good, and when the young engineer had related the incidents of the past night, the young widow fully agreed with him.

It was decided that Bob and Dan should remain in the house that night.

Towards nightfall, but before it was dark, Marvin was seen approaching.

He came to the front-door, rang the bell, and politely asked to see Mrs. Daverage.

"Not at home," was the answer Mrs. Daverage was about to make through the servant, who came into the parlor where Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood were by chance at that moment conversing with her, and announced Marvin.

"Wait," said Bob, "perhaps you had better see the rascal. Dan and I, with Bertha your little daughter, will conceal ourselves in this closet, and we will be ready to prevent any violence should Marvin meditate any."

Mrs. Daverage assented, and when Smokestack Bob, Dan Hood and the little girl whom Bob had saved the night Marvin fancied he had slain both the fireman and his companion were in the closet, Monk Marvin was admitted to the presence of the lady whom he was determined to make his wife, by fair means or by foul.

Marvin did not yet know that Bertha, the little girl, had escaped.

"Good evening, Mrs. Daverage. I took the liberty to call upon you, as I chanced to be in town. Let me offer you my sympathy in this hour of affliction, for, believe me, the death of your little daughter is a severe blow to me,

although, by her death, you are free to reconsider my offer of marriage. May I not hope that now you will yield and consent to become my wife?" said Marvin, in a voice which he strove to make very effective by its feeling.

"I don't understand you. What do you imagine has occurred to my daughter?" answered Mr. Daverage, in feigned surprise.

"Why, she's lost, she's dead, or something, ain't she? Somebody told me so," said Marvin, blundering.

The fact was no one save the members of the family with whom Ethel was visiting knew anything of Bertha's abduction and restoration.

Both had occurred the same night.

So, by his remark about the child, Marvin betrayed himself.

"My little girl is all right," said Mrs. Daverage, carelessly.

"I don't believe it."

"You shall see, sir, although you are so free to doubt my word. Here, Bertha!"

The closet door opened and the little girl ran to her mother's side.

"What means this? Ah, I comprehend. By Heaven, this time I will not fail!" cried Marvin, and he caught the child in his arms and darted toward the door. Anger had rendered him reckless of all consequences.

Bertha shrieked.

Then the closet door opened, and Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood appeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

At the sight of Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood, both of whom were still in the new disguise which they assumed after that rencounter with him and Cotterel, the villain seemed for the moment stricken motionless.

Paralyzed, indeed, with astonishment he seemed.

"Drop that child!" thundered Smokestack Bob.

As he spoke he leveled his revolver at Marvin's head.

The son of the railway prince dropped Bertha to the floor, and the little child, quite terrified, ran sobbing to Ethel.

"Now go, you rascal, before I kick you out, and don't you dare to set foot in this house again," said Bob, sternly.

But before Marvin made answer, Dan Hood leaped forward, and catching the exalted railway official by the back of the neck and the seat of his pants, he ran him to the front door and elevated him upon the top of his boot in a way he would not be likely to forget.

Marvin picked himself up and hurried off, shaking his fists and cursing like a pirate.

He had met with a warmer reception than he had anticipated.

Returning to the hostelry at which he had left his horse, he found his companion, who was really Zeb Cotterel in disguise, and the leader of the tramps and his one follower, seated upon the porch.

They repaired, at his direction, to a private room, and over a bottle of whisky they discussed the situation.

Marvin now knew that the men who had confronted him in the house he had just left were the parties who had thwarted him, and forced him to make a written confession of the robbery of the railroad office at Fairfax.

The assurance of the leader of the tramps was not now needed to convince all of this.

"I am determined to get that paper back, and if I could gain possession of the child again I'd make sure of it.

"I propose that we watch the house, and if the men we are after remain there to-night, we enter the house and capture the child and secure the paper I want, even if we have to kill those two men to get it. I'll take care that the newspapers that my father owns all attribute the outrage to the strikers. You know many of the newspapers dare

not say their soul is their own, save with the permission of the railways. They are usually on the side of capital and against the masses who really support them by buying their papers," said Marvin.

The others assented to this.

The leader of the tramps sent the vagrant who had accompanied him to Elmville to watch the house at which the young widow was visiting, and about one o'clock, Marvin, Zeb Cotterel, and Keever, the tramp, made their way to the house in question.

The tramp, who had watched the house all night, met them in the shadow of a grove opposite it.

"Well, are the men still in the house?" asked Marvin.

"Hain't seed nobody leave the house, boss," replied the tramp.

"Then we can depend on finding them inside?"

"Yes, I reckon so; I pizened ther pup, and I take it everybody inside is sound asleep by this time, for I hain't seed a light er heard a sound since eleven o'clock."

"Very well. Give me the skeleton keys, Zeb, and we'll see what we can do in the way of a little amateur house-breaking.

"I know what room the child I am after occupies with its mother; I found that out when I stole the child the night I placed it on the railroad track," said Marvin.

"There was something peculiar about that affair. The newspapers never said a word about the child, and you say that Smokestack Bob jumped into the canyon with the child in his arms after you sent a bullet through his head. How then came the child safely back at its home? I can't make that out, Monk," said Cotterel.

"Nor I," assented Marvin.

"Unless you were deceived. Who knows but Smokestack Bob escaped with the child?" said Cotterel.

"Bah! We'd heard of him if he'd escaped."

"Perhaps," assented Cotterel, somewhat doubtfully.

They reached a side door now, and soon opened it by the aid of the same skeleton keys with which they had opened the door of the old station-keeper's house.

The door opened upon a wide hall, from which two doors opened—one upon each side. The right-hand door was the entrance to the sleeping-apartment of Ethel Daverage and her little daughter.

The door on the other side of the hall was the entrance to the sitting-room.

"Now, then," whispered Marvin, "I'll steal into the widow's room and secure the child. There's four of us; but there may be more men than the two we are after in the house, so it stands us in hand to proceed with caution. If I get the child all right, and shut off its wind so it can't alarm the house, we'll then search the house until we find the man who has in his possession the paper which I'll risk my life to get!"

Thus speaking, Marvin entered Mrs. Daverage's room.

A moment later he appeared with the child in his arms.

At the same instant the door opposite the widow's sleeping-room opened, and Smokestack Bob and Dan Hood, who were really the only male occupants of the house that night, appeared.

The light streaming from the room from which the two railroad men came disclosed them.

Marvin handed little Bertha to the leader of the tramps, saying:

"Get off with the child, and you shall have the fifty I promised you for securing the paper."

"Gimme ther kid," answered the tramp; and with little Bertha in his arms, he bounded through the door and disappeared, although both Bob and Dan rushed forward to stop him.

Ethel Daverage rushed into the hall as the tramp vanished with Bertha.

"Oh, save my child!" she shrieked.

But Marvin, Cotterel, and the tramp who remained hurled themselves upon the two railroad men.

For a moment our friends had all they could do to defend

themselves; but soon a sledge-hammer blow from the fist of Smokestack Bob stretched out Mr. Monk Marvin, and at the same time Cotterel was knocked down by Dan Hood.

The tramp took to his heels.

Bob and Dan rushed out of the house; and just then the voice of a child, which they recognized as Bertha's, was heard down the road.

"Come on, and we'll overtake the rascal yet!" said Bob.

He and Dan dashed down the road.

But they neither saw nor heard anything of Bertha or her abductor.

A shriek from Ethel now reminded our friends that they had left her alone with the two dangerous men who had fallen beneath their blows, but who had no doubt recovered by this time.

They dashed back to the house, and, as they reached it, they saw Marvin and Cotterel dragging Ethel from the house between them.

"You rascals!" yelled Bob, in indignation, and he and Dan rushed at the two villainous railroad officials—men who went to church and held their heads high as gentlemen of the greatest integrity, but whose secret character the reader is acquainted with.

Marvin and Cotterel had no wish to encounter the two railroad men again.

They released Mrs. Daverage, and ran down the road in the direction taken by the tramp.

"My child, my child! Oh! I shall never see my child again, now that it has fallen into the hands of that monster, Monk Marvin!" wailed Ethel.

They re-entered the house.

Everybody was alarmed, and the widow lady with whom Ethel was visiting and her two grown daughters had come into the sitting-room half dressed and very much alarmed.

While Bob and Dan were trying to reassure them that the danger was passed, there came a heavy rap at the street door, which Bob had secured with a bolt on the inside.

The ladies started and trembled.

"Who's there?" demanded Bob, striding to the door.

"Tommy! Tommy got the baby!" answered a voice.

"Admit him. It's Tommy Tupps, the idiot boy. He has often come here, and he knows Bertha. I gave him a dollar one day, and since then he has been a frequent caller," said Ethel.

Smokestack Bob opened the door.

The idiot boy, whom we saw with Monk Marvin the night of the attack on Bob and Dan when they rescued the child from its bed of snow beside the red light, appeared.

In his arms he carried Bertha.

"Tommy get the baby, Tommy snatch her from man, Tommy good boy—he! he! he!" giggled the idiot.

The delighted mother caught her rescued child to her heart.

"You're a trump boy!" cried Bob, and he gave the idiot a handful of small coins.

The idiot's grandmother lived at Elmville, and he was visiting there, although his mother lived at Fairfax.

Nothing more of interest occurred that night, and next day Bob received notice that he and Dan had been appointed members of a committee of four selected by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers to wait upon the officials of the road, in accordance with the request of those officials, to discuss the situation and arrange some amicable settlement of the present difficulties.

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Bob and Dan met the other two of their committee at Fairfax, and he sent a note to Monk Marvin, which read as follows:

"The man who holds your confession goes to-day to meet the committee of the officials. He will offer the following terms for a settlement of the strike, which are the same as the company refused to accept *before* the strike, viz., an increase of 10 per cent. on wages, and payment for all over-work and Sundays, and that no man who has engaged in this strike be discharged for that reason.

"If these terms are accepted by your father, I will place your confession in your hands, if you promise to leave this part of the country."

Upon reading this note, Monk Marvin hastened to the city, where the meeting between the officials and the committee of the Brotherhood was to take place.

He interviewed his father before that meeting.

The result was a surprise to the whole country. The railroads capitulated, and accepted the engineers' terms.

The Brotherhood had won the fight, but no one, save Bob and Dan Hood, knew the secret by which this was brought about.

True to his word, Smokestack Bob gave Monk Marvin the confession he had forced him to write.

"In God's name, who are you? Are you man or devil?" demanded Marvin.

"Smokestack Bob, at your service," answered the engineer, throwing off his disguise.

"And I am Dan Hood," cried the fireman.

"You failed to kill us, and you have been thwarted and beaten by us in all your villainous schemes," said Bob.

"Fool that I was not to have suspected the truth!" cried Marvin, and, clutching the confession as though he feared that the two railroad men might take it from him, he fled from their presence with bitter curses upon his lips.

In Europe, a few years later, Marvin was killed in a duel.

At a meeting of the Brotherhood of Engineers, some time later, Smokestack Bob discovered that Zeb Cotterel was present in disguise.

He was forced to confess that he had been the secret spy who had given away the secrets of the order.

Had it not been for Smokestack Bob, it is possible that Cotterel would not have escaped alive, but he promised to leave the country, and so he was permitted to depart.

Afterwards he turned up as a swindler in Chicago.

Smokestack Bob was, two years later, married to Ethel Daverage, for it had been God's will that the little one she had cherished so fondly should be taken from her.

Bob, eventually, patented an improvement for the steam-engine which brought him a fortune, and, as Dan Hood was his partner, he, too, was suddenly made wealthy.

But neither were any happier than they had been when they were poor men fighting the capitalists, as members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

[THE END.]

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